

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

MEMORANDUM

UNESCO: PROSPECTS FOR THE 20th GENERAL CONFERENCE

*At its 20th General Conference in Paris next month, the UN Educational Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) may be facing its most divisive meeting since 1974 when the membership barred Israeli participation in the European regional group. That act led to a decision by the US Congress to suspend temporarily payment of US dues, amounting to 25 percent of the overall budget. The US has since resumed paying its dues. In introducing or supporting a number of highly contentious issues for consideration by the conference, the UNESCO leadership and some of the LDC actors may be underestimating the impact that adoption of these proposals would have on the industrialized countries in general and on US public and Congressional opinion in particular.*

*One of the most contentious issues at the upcoming General Conference will be approval of the final draft declaration on mass media, a document which establishes the principle of state responsibility for control over all media that enter into or circulate within a country. Director General M'Bow, a Senegalese, will submit a report or a final draft declaration on mass media, and UNESCO will probably adopt some version of it.*

- It is likely that the provisions in the declaration will be less stringent than those tabled in previous drafts.*
- Significant opposition to the current draft still exists among industrialized nations, and this opposition will diminish only if Director General M'Bow modifies part of the current draft.*

*This memorandum was prepared in the International Issues Division of the Office of Regional and Political Analysis. Questions and comments may be addressed to the author, [REDACTED]*

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- Most of the key LDCs support the draft and are not likely to vote against it. Some of them may be willing to act as a moderating force in behind-the-scenes negotiating.
- The Soviet bloc will strongly support the draft and will probably attempt to include more stringent provisions.

Other divisive topics that will be discussed at the UNESCO General Conference this year are hardly new; they have been the source of tension at previous conferences, and several of them are rooted in the conflict between the Arabs and Israelis. Although no UNESCO body has condemned Israel since 1976, there will be a concerted effort to include anti-Israel proposals in some of the resolutions. Support for this Arab effort will depend to some extent on perceptions of the outcome of the Camp David summit.

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#### DRAFT DECLARATION ON MASS MEDIA PRINCIPLES

A draft declaration on mass media principles has been a contentious issue in UNESCO since it was first suggested by the Soviets at the UNESCO General Conference in 1972. The declaration became a subject of dispute during the next two conferences, and in 1976 a vote on it was postponed. Industrialized nations objected strenuously to the draft tabled at the meeting in 1976, and the Director General was tasked "to hold further broad consultations with experts with a view to preparing a final draft which could meet the largest possible measure of agreement." The text that the Director General issued on 21 August is his most recent attempt to present an acceptable draft.

The preamble of the most recent draft emphasizes limitations on the freedom of expression. It also includes an implicit reference equating Zionism with racism. The provisions of the draft lay the groundwork for state control of domestic media, state responsibility for its news media overseas, and regulation of local correspondents of foreign news media.

#### LDC Perspectives

Increased awareness of what the LDCs perceive as an "information imbalance" will hamper possible attempts by the industrialized nations

to defer a vote on this issue next month. LDC interest in the declaration has grown in the past few years as they have attempted to organize their own news pools and promote exchanges with international news agencies. The nonaligned foreign ministers endorsed these efforts in the final documents to their meeting in Belgrade last July. The coordinating council of the nonaligned news agencies pool resolved last April that the UNESCO Director-General should submit a mass media declaration to the 20th General Conference for a vote. The council also asked that the principles of the declaration be expanded to include a reference to the Zionism/racism equation.

Most LDCs probably view the language in the most recent mass media declaration as vastly toned down from previous drafts. Consequently, they will probably have difficulty comprehending industrialized countries' objections to it.

Individual LDC attitudes toward the declaration on mass media principles differ substantially although potential trends are visible. The overwhelming majority advocate adoption of the draft, but their reasons for doing so vary. Even among the group of LDCs whose long-term involvement in mass media questions precludes any doubt that they will strongly support the text, there are different reasons for supporting the draft.\* Some, such as Cuba, Libya, and North Korea, that are active in the nonaligned news agencies pool coordinating council, may propose language in the declaration that would further restrict the role of the media and will probably instigate a call for a vote even if the Director General does not introduce the declaration. Others in the group like Mexico and Venezuela are more concerned with correcting the information imbalance through more practical and less rhetorical means and will probably not be active leaders in organizing LDC support for the declaration.

A second group of LDCs will support the draft mainly to ensure their status within the nonaligned movement. Countries such as Nigeria and Tanzania will probably vote for the declaration even though they might not actively participate in the debate or in the working group

\* This group--composed of such countries as Cuba, Algeria, Libya, Vietnam, North Korea, Mexico, and Venezuela--has long espoused the need for a broad series of changes in international communications issues that are informally termed the New World Information Order. Many of these countries have played a major role in the nonaligned or regional news agencies pools.

negotiations. These LDCs will be the target of persuasion by the activists in the nonaligned news agencies pool and may be influenced--for extraneous tradeoffs--to push hard for the declaration.

A number of LDCs in the nonaligned movement could work as a moderating force in the behind-the-scenes maneuvering on the declaration or in a procedural vote. These countries--which include Yugoslavia, Jordan, and the ASEAN nations--would be unlikely to take a public stand against the declaration, however, for fear of compromising their influence among the nonaligned.

To some LDCs, such as Saudi Arabia, the mass media declaration is a low-priority item. Any attempt to determine the degree of support they will give to the declaration is complicated by the prospect that their policies are likely to be affected by extraneous concerns.

A small but vocal group of LDCs will probably join the Western nations in opposing the draft. Countries like Ivory Coast, Togo, Liberia, Haiti, and Costa Rica have supported Western initiatives in previous conferences and are expected to do so in October. These nations support the ideal of a free press despite, in some cases, government-imposed restrictions on their own press organizations.

#### Soviet Bloc Views

The Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries strongly support the declaration on mass media principles, but their motives differ from those of the LDCs. The Soviets were the first to request UNESCO action on a declaration, and they have a special interest in its adoption. They have also organized several joint projects between the Soviet-sponsored International Organization of Journalists (IOJ) and UNESCO.

The Eastern bloc perceives information as essentially a tool of state policy, and they hope to obtain international acknowledgement that all governments have the right to control communications. The Soviets fear technological changes that open up new means of communication. This concern is reflected in their position in the UN Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, where they advocate permitting receiving nations to place restrictions on the content of broadcasts transmitted from satellites. The bloc countries also believe that the mass media issue gives them a common ground even with those LDCs that are heavily

influenced by the West. Members of the Eastern bloc will probably join the more radical IDCs in proposing more restrictive language on the freedom of the media.

#### Industrialized Nations' Attitudes

The industrialized nations--the EC Nine, the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, and Japan--were instrumental in deferring a vote on the declaration during the last two general conferences. They have issued no official statements on the draft of 21 August, although several have indicated that they view it as an improvement over previous drafts. The EC Nine will meet in Bonn on 2 October to discuss the draft, and members of the European media community will join them.

Western media representatives criticized the draft at a meeting on 5 September in London, and they will probably reiterate their objections to their governments. Media representatives object to the draft because it endorses state control of the media and provides no specific measures to protect journalists. The vagueness of the requirement in the declaration to respect the rights of all nations bothers them as does the requirement to denounce the evils of racism, apartheid, colonialism, and neocolonialism.

Industrialized nations will probably find the implicit reference in the mass media declaration to the Zionism/racism equation unacceptable. They may also oppose the lack of explicit recognition of the need for a free flow of information. They differ, however, on what defines a free flow of information and what constitutes restrictions on it. The major question is whether the industrialized nations will attempt to amend the draft or decide to oppose it completely.

Some of the industrialized countries, such as Switzerland and the UK, oppose a draft in any form. They doubt the propriety of UNESCO's role in mass media issues, and they perceive the declaration as a harmful diversion from the practical assistance that they would prefer to give to the Third World.

Other developed nations, like Sweden and Norway, probably oppose the current draft but might be persuaded to vote for an amended version.

If the Zionism/racism equation were removed and if the draft gave more weight to the free flow of information, the declaration might be acceptable to them. Amendments such as these, which would largely reverse the direction of the declaration, are unlikely, however, and the chances are good that the industrialized nations generally will once again form the core of the opposition to the declaration.

#### ARAB-ISRAELI ISSUES

##### Race and Racial Prejudice

Item 20 on the provisional agenda for the conference is the Draft Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice. The declaration was adopted at the UNESCO Conference on Race and Racial Prejudice last March and is up for approval by all UNESCO members. While it currently includes no reference to the Zionism/racism equation, the Arab states will probably try to add one, as they did at the meeting in March. Their success, however, may be impeded by Director General M'Bow's influence over the African nations, whose stance against an anti-Israeli proposal in March prevented the adoption of the Zionism/racism clause.

##### Jerusalem

The second area in which the Arab-Israeli conflict will appear is Item 21, the Director General's report on Jerusalem. This resolution, which originated at the 1974 General Conference, not only condemns Israel for altering the character of Jerusalem by constructing high rise buildings and carrying out archeological excavations but also withholds UNESCO financial aid. At the 1976 conference, the resolution on Jerusalem was reaffirmed despite strong Western objections.

This year the Director General will again report on the situation in Jerusalem, and because new plans for excavations were announced during July in the Jerusalem Post, his report will probably trigger an effort by the Arabs to reaffirm the 1974 resolution against the Israelis. Furthermore, an effort to include harsher sanctions and more radical anti-Israel language may occur. The views of the Africans will again determine the success of any possible Arab move to include a Zionism/racism clause in the resolution on Jerusalem.

Occupied Territories

In a resolution passed at the 1974 UNESCO General Conference, the Director General was instructed to take full responsibility for the educational and cultural institutions of the inhabitants of the occupied territories, a task that requires Israeli cooperation. At the 1976 conference, M'Bow was reminded of his responsibility by the reaffirmation of the 1974 resolution, and he will report on the status of education and culture in the occupied territories next month. M'Bow has received approval from the UNESCO executive board for an action plan that he has drawn up which includes several proposals that could only be implemented by Israel. The Israelis will probably object to M'Bow's ideas, among which is the recommendation to place a high-level UNESCO official in the territories. M'Bow's determination to fulfill his responsibility despite Israeli objections will probably introduce a third area of conflict where Arab attacks on Israel--perhaps even an effort to exclude it from UNESCO--may develop.

OTHER INFLUENCES ON THE PROCEEDINGSImpact of Multilateral Meetings

The results of other recent multilateral meetings could also impact on the prospects for anti-Israel activities at the General Conference. In late July, the nonaligned foreign ministers included several references to the Zionism/racism equation in the final document of their meeting in Belgrade, and the World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination closed late last month by approving a final document that includes several references to Israel that are highly objectionable to the Western nations. The US did not take part in the meeting, and the LDCs were unable to negotiate an acceptable text with the Western countries. The EC Nine, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand left the meeting. Any attempts by the LDCs to include a reference to the final document from the August meeting on racism in the UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice will trigger a strong reaction from the Western countries at the General Conference.

The atmosphere of the UN General Assembly and the discussion there of topics such as the New International Economic Order (NIEO) may also

affect the UNESCO meeting. General IDC interest in the NIEO and the influence of various high-level UNESCO officials such as M'Bow and delegates such as former Mexican President Echeverria suggest that discussion of the NIEO may occupy a significant part of the debate on general policy issues.

#### Internal Factors

Several internal factors will probably influence the activities at the General Conference. The election of a president of the conference presented no problems a few months ago when the Canadians proposed the only candidate. Since then, however, the Arabs have advanced a contender, and his selection would aggravate the already tense situation concerning possible anti-Israel resolutions.

The order of the agenda could also affect how various delegates will vote. For example, if tempers fly over the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice, this might influence the vote on the mass media declaration.

On some issues, the composition of the delegations will have a significant impact. For example, the Tunisian foreign minister fully supported the Yugoslav draft on mass media at the nonaligned foreign ministers meeting in Belgrade, a document that only mildly criticizes the Western nations. If he attends the General Conference, he might exert a moderating influence in a working group environment on the mass media question. Should another prominent Tunisian official attend, Secretary of State for Information Masmoudi, his primary goal would be to amend the draft declaration to include far more strident language.

#### Pressures On M'Bow

There are also many pressures on M'Bow. To have a productive meeting, he must not only stop the Africans from voting with the Arabs, on anti-Israeli proposals--as he did at the conference last March--but he must also try to secure continued support from the Western nations whose financial assistance is essential for many specific UNESCO activities. He is also caught between conflicting demands on the mass media issue. If he introduces a draft that is objectionable to the industrialized nations, he risks splitting the meeting; if he fails to introduce a draft he may lose the support of his largest constituency, the LDCs.



OUTLOOK

The UNESCO conference is likely to be one of the most difficult international meetings for the US in some time. The substance of the issues under consideration, the likelihood of sharp rhetorical confrontation over sensitive Arab/Israeli related problems, and the limits on US influence over the proceedings will make it difficult for the US to attain even its current limited objectives.

The debate over the mass media declaration strikes at the heart of one of the US' most deeply held values--the free flow of information--leaving little room for negotiating flexibility. At the same time, most of the Third World countries favor a concept of balanced information flows, and even some of our OECD partners view the question of the free flow of information in terms that are not as all encompassing as those of the US.

A sober debate on these issues would be difficult under the best of circumstances. At UNESCO, the debate will become embroiled in a host of tangentially related issues, the most contentious of which will highlight the same Arab/Israeli tensions that once before led to US action inimical to the organization and limited the ability of the US to project its influence in it.

At the conference, trade-offs through concessions on some other issues may be important if the US is to secure its objectives on the mass media declaration. The US has little to offer on the declaration itself that most LDCs will find acceptable. Many LDCs may believe that the draft has already been significantly weakened and that further modification would result in a resolution reaffirming a status quo that they find increasingly difficult to tolerate. Possible concessions on economic issues at the conference, such as promises of increased communications aid, would probably only have limited impact. Little has been done so far to carry out US offers at the 1976 UNESCO General Conference to increase communications aid, and the generally slow pace of other North-South negotiations could also tend to limit US credibility.

A final factor that could affect attitudes toward reaching an accommodation with the US and other industrialized countries on contentious issues is a possible insensitivity to US domestic politics.

Notwithstanding the experience of 1974 when Congress suspended the payment of US dues to UNESCO, some LDCs may underestimate the extent of a possible backlash of US public and Congressional opinion in the event the conference adopts positions sharply in conflict with US goals and interest. Moreover, most LDCs will perceive that the previous withholding of US dues from UNESCO did not seriously disrupt the organization. The LDCs will also be aware that the US withdrawal from the International Labor Organization has not crippled that body. Thus US leverage at the 20th General Conference will be limited because even the extreme prospect of US withdrawal may be perceived by most members as more damaging to US interests than to those of UNESCO.